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MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Assistant to the President for National
Security Affairs

SUBJECT:

I forward for your background a short paper by CIA's most experienced expert on Castro. The paper concerns Castro's possible reactions in the event of a confrontation with the US, or a US approach to his territory.

William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence

Attachment:
As Stated

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12 March 1982

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Castro's Reactions to Possible Confrontation with the US

1. Any plan to confront Castro by approaching his territory militarily, for whatever purpose, will entail considerable risk. Even if the operation could be carried out without significant error or mishap, and avoided conflict with Cuban military forces, there is only a small chance that Castro could control his rage and accept the US action as a fait accompli. The likelihood is extremely high, on the other hand, that he would immediately take the offensive, stridently denouncing the United States while beginning a series of retaliatory actions that would result in a protracted Caribbean crisis. He would seek from the outset to enlist foreign -- including Soviet -- support, and would try to distract the US by provoking or stoking problems in other countries. Castro would be likely, moreover, to brood and plot further revenge against the United States for an extended period of time.

2. The spectrum of Castro's possible responses and options is broad, and he and his top advisers might analyze them in something like the following fashion. At the bottom of the scale, there is only a negligible chance -- perhaps 5 percent -- that Castro would be able to contain his fury and accept the humiliation he would certainly feel once the impact of the US action were publicly known. There is a much greater likelihood -- in the range of 20 percent -- that he would immediately take the propaganda and diplomatic initiative, but that his responses would amount mostly to "impotent rage." A set of options with the greatest likelihood -- 30 percent -- might be described as "limited confrontation" with the United States, characterized by violent and spectacular Cuban actions aimed at saving face while minimizing the risk of military conflict. There would also be a high risk -- about 25 percent -- of "tactical military confrontations" between Cuba and the United States that would run a high risk of further military escalation. Finally, given Castro's paranoia and frustrations of the last few years, and the stresses he has been under, there is as much as a 20 percent chance that he would opt fatalistically for full-scale military conflict with the United States.

3. Passive resignation. There is little in Castro's approximately 35 years in public life that would suggest he could passively endure a major US action that would embarrass him with supporters at home and abroad. Since the late 1940s when he was

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5. Impotent rage. There is perhaps a 20 percent chance that Castro would confine his response to vicious propaganda and diplomatic offensives and other small scale but low risk actions against the United States. The style of the reaction would be to deliver long, impassioned harangues, go to the UN and mount a propaganda campaign internationally in which he would be likely to gain considerable support. He might also organize popular demonstrations and violent outbursts in Havana of the type he mounted in the spring of 1980. US diplomats would probably be harassed, and expelled from Cuba. Castro could also order the closing of the commercial air corridor over Cuba, mass forces near Guantanamo, put his military forces on high alert, and seem to threaten US reconnaissance flights. The objective of these and other possible actions would be to save face and put the US on the defensive in the international community, while avoiding the risk of escalation. His moderate advisers, including Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, would probably advise such a course.

6. Limited confrontation. There is perhaps a 30 percent chance that Castro would choose to enter into a series of controlled confrontations with the United States that would nonetheless, significantly increase the risks of military conflict. He could orchestrate the seizure of the US Interests Section in Havana by "students" or mobs, encourage disaffected citizens to invade the Guantanamo base, organize a second exodus by small boats. He would be likely to step up covert operations

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in Central America and perhaps elsewhere, and might decide appreciably to increase support for the Salvadoran guerrillas. If he were in this frame of mind before the 28 March elections in that country, he might take greater than usual risks to upset them. He might even order the "accidental" shootdown of a commercial jet over Cuba. Many of Castro's hardline advisers would probably counsel him to retaliate in some of these and similar ways.

7. Tactical military confrontations. There is perhaps as much as a 25 percent chance that Castro would try to retaliate in many of the ways described above, and that limited military engagements between US and Cuban forces would also occur. Even a limited reaction might result in an order for Cuban MIGs or naval vessels to fire on US patrols. He might also order the shootdown of US military aircraft approaching Guantanamo, and launch missiles against US reconnaissance planes. Such actions would run the high risk of leading to general military conflict. Castro might calculate, nonetheless, that his regime is so threatened by the Reagan administration that limited military conflict might be the best means of riveting international attention on Cuban-US problems, and of forcing the United States to back down. He would also calculate no doubt, that such conflict would increase pressure on the USSR to enhance its defense commitments to Cuba. There is a good chance, in addition, that in a climate of rising Cuban-US tensions, such limited military engagements could occur accidentally.

8. Large-scale conflict. There is perhaps as much as a 20 percent chance that Castro would react to any large-scale actions by the United States as if they signalled the onset of general hostilities. As during the Bay of Pigs invasion, he would fully mobilize his armed forces and militia, and issue general alarms to the populace. Although most of these measures probably would also be taken in the "tactical military confrontation" context described above, Castro could fatalistically decide to mount a major offensive against the United States. If he were under pressure and great psychological strain - as he has often seemed to be over the last two years or so -- he could throw caution to the winds in a desperate effort to revive his increasingly discredited resolution and to rally large numbers of disenchanted youth. If he were in an apocalyptic mood, Castro might order offensive military strikes against US forces near Cuba, launch an invasion of Guantanamo, and strike at targets on the US mainland. He might gamble that Cuba's powerful military forces would be able to withstand US assaults long enough for international opinion to turn strongly in his favor.

9. Reducing Risk. There are ways possibly to reduce the risks growing out of a limited US military operation against Cuba, whatever its purpose. The risk of Castro overreacting is greatest in a situation in which he learns of a US operation, reacts angrily, and begins immediately to organize acts of retaliation -- instinctively taking the offensive within a few hours.

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10. Therefore, the US first should try to plan any operation so as to compel Castro to weigh slowly and methodically the full range of options and to force him to consult with as many of his advisers as possible. The more senior Cuban officials who are brought into consultations with him, the greater will be the likelihood that he will consider a range of options. If the Cuban reaction time is slowed down, moreover, the chances will increase that Soviet leaders, and others in Latin America and Europe, will advise Castro to limit his retaliation.

--If an operation were carried out so that Castro only gradually became aware of its magnitude, the chances would probably be greater that a large number of his advisers would be brought in and that time would work to the advantage of the United States.

11. Second, the longer international publicity about an operation could be delayed, the greater the chance that Castro could control his rage and sense of humiliation. Claims of great success or "victory" by US officials would have highly exacerbating effects.

12. Third, US planners should somehow endeavor to let Castro save face. The more he perceives the operation as a direct personal affront and embarrassment, the more likely he will be to over react. If, on the other hand, he can -- with the advice of other Cuban officials -- come to view the operation in a larger context, the chances would increase that Havana would limit its retaliation.

13. Finally, perhaps the best time to carry out such an operation for all the above reasons would be when Castro is traveling abroad. (It is questionable, however, that he will take a foreign journey in the foreseeable future, precisely out of fear of being away from his top military commanders and lines of communication if a crisis with the United States develops.

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